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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twelfth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 311th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 5 June 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. SARDENBERG

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Cyprus (CRC/C/8/Add.24; HRI/CORE/1/Add.28; CRC/C.11/WP.3) (continued)

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee to consider the question of special protection measures, dealt with in paragraphs 25 to 31 of the list of issues (CRC/C.11/WP.3)

2. Miss MASON noted the extensive use of social work agencies in all areas in the life of the child in Cyprus, including juvenile justice. However, she would like to know whether there was any machinery for diverting children away from the criminal justice system, with a view to prevention rather than cure. Such machinery might consist of a multidisciplinary committee which would look into the cause of the infraction of the law by the juvenile and decide on a course of action.

3. With regard to the question of remanding a minor for trial, she would welcome clarification of the statement in paragraph 195 of the report that a court could remand a minor to custody in a police station. What were the facilities in a police station and how they were set up to accommodate a minor?

4. Ms. PAPAONISIFOROU (Cyprus), referring to the question of displaced children, said that about 50,000 children had been involved and their families had been helped by several United Nations bodies. The Government had managed to redress the situation somewhat, but children were still deprived of their right to return to their families.

5. Mr. ZACKHEOS (Cyprus) said that a few days previously his country's Minister of Health had met with UNHCR and WHO officials and had asked whether an expert could undertake a study on the psychological effects suffered by displaced persons. Several organizations were very interested in the question.

6. Ms. PAPAONISIFOROU (Cyprus) said there was a Department of Social Welfare programme, currently involving about 4,000 families with various problems, designed to achieve a better understanding between parents and children. That programme had been responsible for the fact that in 1993, 1994 and 1995 only 220 children had been involved in crimes.

7. With regard to the remanding of children in police stations, she said that the police inquiry took place in the presence of the parents if the child was under 15 years of age. It was to be noted that the children were kept separate from adults.

8. Mr. KOLOSOV said that 220 was not a big figure but as a proportion it was not that low. Therefore, the Government should seek to decrease even the figure of 220.

9. Miss MASON said that the Committee gleaned information from many sources. One source had expressed concern about the level of female prostitution in Cyprus. There was also information to the effect that some girls were brought in as domestic servants. The Committee was aware of the fact that child labour and prostitution were prohibited in Cyprus but she would like to know what further guarantees and protection were afforded in that regard.

10. Mr. ZACKHEOS (Cyprus) said that, first of all, there had never been a case involving a female prostitute who was under age. However, there had been reports in the press and for the last six to eight months the police had been waging a continuous campaign against the phenomenon. The problem was that women who had been willing to say that they had been forced by club owners to become prostitutes then they came and retracted their earlier statements.

11. Ms. HADJIANASTASIOU (Cyprus) said that the number of offenders below the age of 16 had been decreasing for the past few years. She agreed on the need to reduce the number still further. With regard to the nature of the offences, 60 per cent were in the serious category and 40 per cent were minor offences.

12. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to make their preliminary concluding observations.

13. Mr. KOLOSOV noted the State party's position that the Constitution and the law recognized the right of every person to lodge complaints and to freedom of thought and expression and that children were therefore covered by those rights as well. The difficulty was that society did not necessarily regard children as full persons, which was why the international community had come to the conclusion that an instrument dealing specifically with the rights of children was needed. His recommendation was that, when the delegates returned to their country, they should inform the population as a whole about the Convention and the Committee, and about its recommendations and suggestions.

14. Miss MASON said that Cyprus was a mature society which had reached most of the goals of the Convention, and its report showed the Government's clear intention to involve children in the whole process of establishing and observing their rights. The Committee encouraged the Government and all concerned to continue to seek a peaceful settlement to the dispute which had divided the island in the best interests of all its children.

15. She thought that the Interministerial Commission would be able to eliminate the remaining discrepancies between the Convention and domestic legislation. In particular, the problem of the ages of criminal responsibility and sexual consent needed to be amended in order to protect that unfortunate group of 16 to 18-year-olds who were dealt with in the courts as adults, and to afford better protection to girls of 16 or 17 who were the victims of sex offences. The right of the children of small ethnic groups such as the Armenians, Lebanese and Arabs, needed special attention, starting with the provision of translations of the Convention to inform them of their rights.

16. She welcomed the removal of discrimination with respect to citizenship, and the openness which allowed more victims of abuse to come forward and seek assistance without fear of prejudice. She also noted that the health care and education provided to children in Cyprus seemed adequate.

17. Mrs. EUFEMIO commended the delegation on the implementation of certain aspects of the Convention, especially those which provided comprehensive assistance to parents. However, more research was needed to monitor the effectiveness of government programmes and services. She recommended the collection of reliable statistics as a basis for better planning in the implementation of the Convention. She acknowledged that rights were not normally attained unless welfare was first guaranteed.

18. Mrs. KARP emphasized that the implementation of the Convention was not merely a question of legislation, but an ongoing effort to change attitudes, which required the Government to remain self-critical and not to rest on its laurels.

19. Mr. ZACKHEOS (Cyprus) thanked the Committee for all its useful suggestions, which would be studied carefully, and undertook to send the Committee the various documents promised during the course of the discussion.

20. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for its cooperation and invited Committee members to hold private consultations immediately after the meeting rose.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.